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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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EDITORIAL

Complications plague Oregon's latest election

OUR OPINION: Low voter turnout, questionable legislative decisions and confusing ballot measures helped make this week's election a disaster

In theory, the election process should be fairly simple. Present the voters with a series of options, let them vote, and whatever gets the most votes wins. The theory is simple — the actual process is somewhat more complicated. And all too often, the entire process leaves everyone with a bitter taste in their mouths.

This latest election proved to be no exception. Despite hopes that mail-in ballots would increase voter turnout, less than 50 percent of the registered voters in Oregon even bothered to mail their ballots in. Not only did this partly discredit the notion that mail-in ballots would increase voter turnout, it doomed two would-be levies that might have passed if more people had showed up.

The two local levies, 20-83 and 20-84, created to make up for the loss of revenue due to Measure 47 (soon to become Measure 50) were approved by a majority of the voters. However, because of Measure 47, any measure that 50 percent of the registered voters don't vote on automatically fails.

So even though the voters who actually voted supported both levies, the levies will not go into effect because of low voter turnout. Under this mixed-up system, these no-shows did not really abstain by not voting. They actually ended up voting "no" on all of the measures.

The mail-in election led to more problems than just low voter turnout. With over a quarter of the votes already in, the Legislature decided to make a few last-minute adjustments in Measure 50. And it wasn't just a matter of a change in lan-

guage; the actual numbers were altered.

So over a quarter of the voters voted for a version of Measure 50 that wasn't the same as the version that ended up passing. Not only is this a complete violation of voters' trust, it may be illegal. There is already talk that now Measure 50 will be challenged in the courts. This is an ironic twist, given the fact that Measure 50 was created in the hope of avoiding a court conflict over Measure 47.

Whether Measure 50 will actually be overruled because of the Legislature's move is anyone's guess, which brings up another problem with the elections — they were just plain complicated.

Trying to find out what is better for Oregon — Measure 50 or 47 — is hard enough. Trying to figure out which one is more likely to be upheld in the courts and whether or not they contradict other levies on the ballot is close to impossible. Even for the people making the laws.

The Eugene City Council was baffled in trying to figure out what the measures being proposed would actually do. If the city council can't figure out what these measures will do, how is the average citizen supposed to?

It's no wonder less than half the registered voters turned out to vote. When the Legislature changes a measure in the middle of an election and no one knows if any of the measures are even constitutional, it's hard to get motivated to vote.

Maybe we're expecting too much from a state election. But we aren't asking for a flawlessly run election, just one that makes sense. If that's too much to ask, perhaps it's time to change the way our voting system works. If not, choosing not to vote could become an increasingly popular trend.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

The Drawing Board



LETTERS

Old friends

Until your May 8 editorial, I was not aware that handling adversity was a prerequisite to being here. Thanks to all of you adversity-seekers; this year was life in hell for a lot of very hard-working and good people.

We have worked at Footnotes because we believed in students having jobs and academic support services. Instead of being ceaselessly abused by you, we should have been commended for meeting our deadlines while fighting for our very existence.

Footnotes has always been about students and learning, about charging low prices and saving students money. We didn't gouge students and bankroll money so that we could relocate when the EMU decided to evict us.

It's not surprising to see your editor-in-chief take a page out of Jenna Wasson's book. He subscribes to Footnotes and enjoys the fruits of our labor while stopping at nothing to destroy whatever dedication to our mission we had left!

With "friends" like the Emerald

editorial staff, who needs enemies? Your reporting on Footnotes and your irrational argument in opposition to our ballot measure convinced me that j-school profs are right when they use the ODE as an example of shoddy journalism. Rather than do your homework and express an informed opinion, you waged war on Footnotes.

Having managed Footnotes for nine of its 30 years, I am proud to have been part of providing a career-relevant and positive work environment for more than 500 students and lecture notes and other services for more than 50,000 students.

Accuse us of poor judgment and view us as whiny if you must, but I'd rather have my karma to live with than yours.

Kristin King
Footnotes Coordinator

Want it Back

In response to the recent Emerald article on the Riverfront Research Park (ODE, May 20), it is important to consider why the park is being developed. All

across the nation, universities are doing research for corporations. This trend in research is popular for two basic reasons.

First and foremost, it is much cheaper for a company to have students do their research than hiring professional research institutions. Second, it is money for the often starving universities that are increasingly the recipient of devastating funding cuts. This corporate money is not a donation; it is an investment that they expect a return on and clearly places noble academic pursuits in danger from influence.

Funding cuts make universities dependent on private money. This is a major reason the university has chosen to develop the Willamette Scenic Corridor. This decision was made without a legitimate effort to hear what students want.

Currently, the We Want it Back Committee has filed an initiative to restrict the development. Diane Wiley, the Riverfront Research Park project manager, responded to development opposition by saying in the Emerald: "...these kinds of things are just, you

know, time-consuming and cumbersome and certainly divert our energy." The corporate juggernaut is rolling; heaven forbid that a group of citizens would actually stand up for their beliefs.

The Willamette Scenic Corridor is a unique natural domain that many students and other Eugene residents enjoy. The University's decision to develop the Corridor with a full-scale effort without significant student input further exemplifies how corporate interests dominate the University's decision-making process.

Michael Olson
Political Science

Comfort unnecessary

When some downtown mall merchants and customers felt "uncomfortable" with alternative-looking youth near the Willamette Street fountain, the fountain was razed and the street opened to traffic. Now, because the same merchants and customers continue to feel "uncomfortable" with alternative-looking youth on the mall, police sweeps

and the reopening of Broadway Street are discussed as "solutions." Because these sensitive individuals also feel "uncomfortable" viewing exposed female breasts in public, the city council considers criminalizing breasts.

On the state and national level, politicians "uncomfortable" at the thought that some citizens choose to use drugs have criminalized such behavior at a cost of ruined lives, wasted tax dollars and increases in violent crimes. Here at home, when 13th Avenue merchants and customers felt "uncomfortable" with alternative-looking individuals and drug activity in their neighborhood, the city responded with dog and skateboard bans, discriminatory police sweeps and arrests.

Let's bear in mind that the founders of this nation designed for freedom, not "comfort." Tolerance of others' lifestyles and ideas is often "uncomfortable." But let us try to respect the wisdom of the design, along with one another.

John Davidson
Eugene